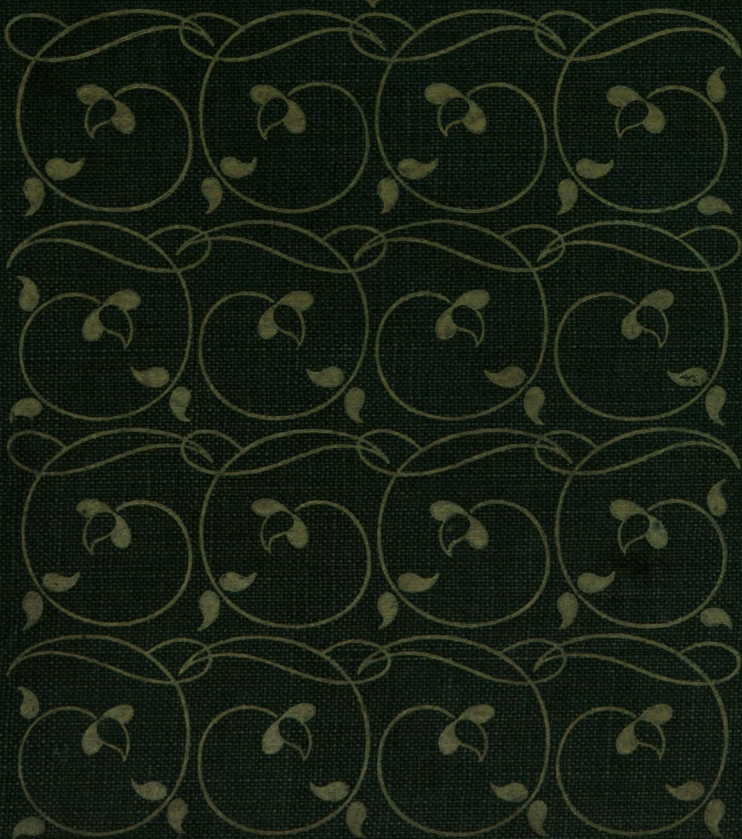


AIDS TO THE DEVOTIONAL
STUDY OF SCRIPTURE

FADED MYTHS

A. S. PEAKE, D.D.

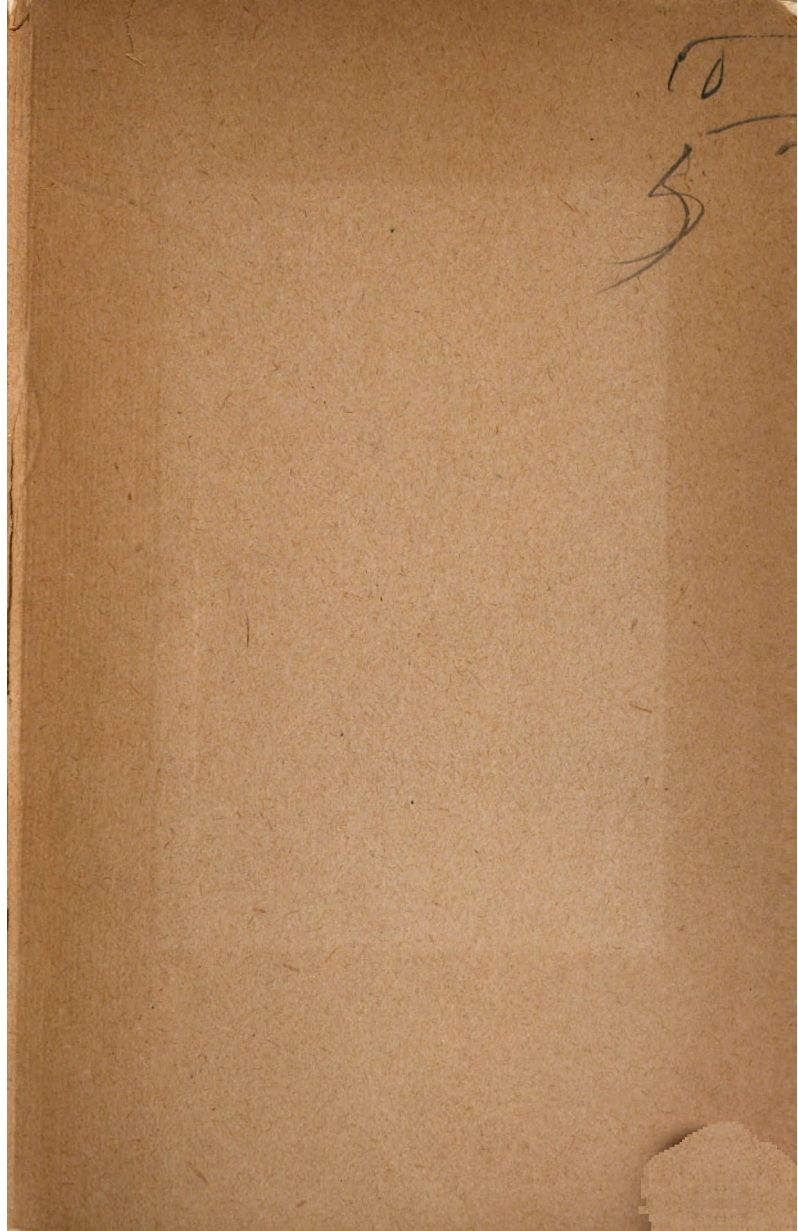


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*Aids to the Devotional
Study of Scripture*

*Aids to the Devotional Study of
Scripture*

By
A. S. Peake, D.D.

I
The Christian Race

II
Election and Service

III
Faded Myths

London : Hodder and Stoughton

Faded Myths

By
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TO THE
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NOTE

ALTHOUGH the title of the book coincides with that of the first chapter, it applies also to the later chapters, which deal with the conquest of the chaos-demon, the Son of the Dawn, and the angel-marriages.

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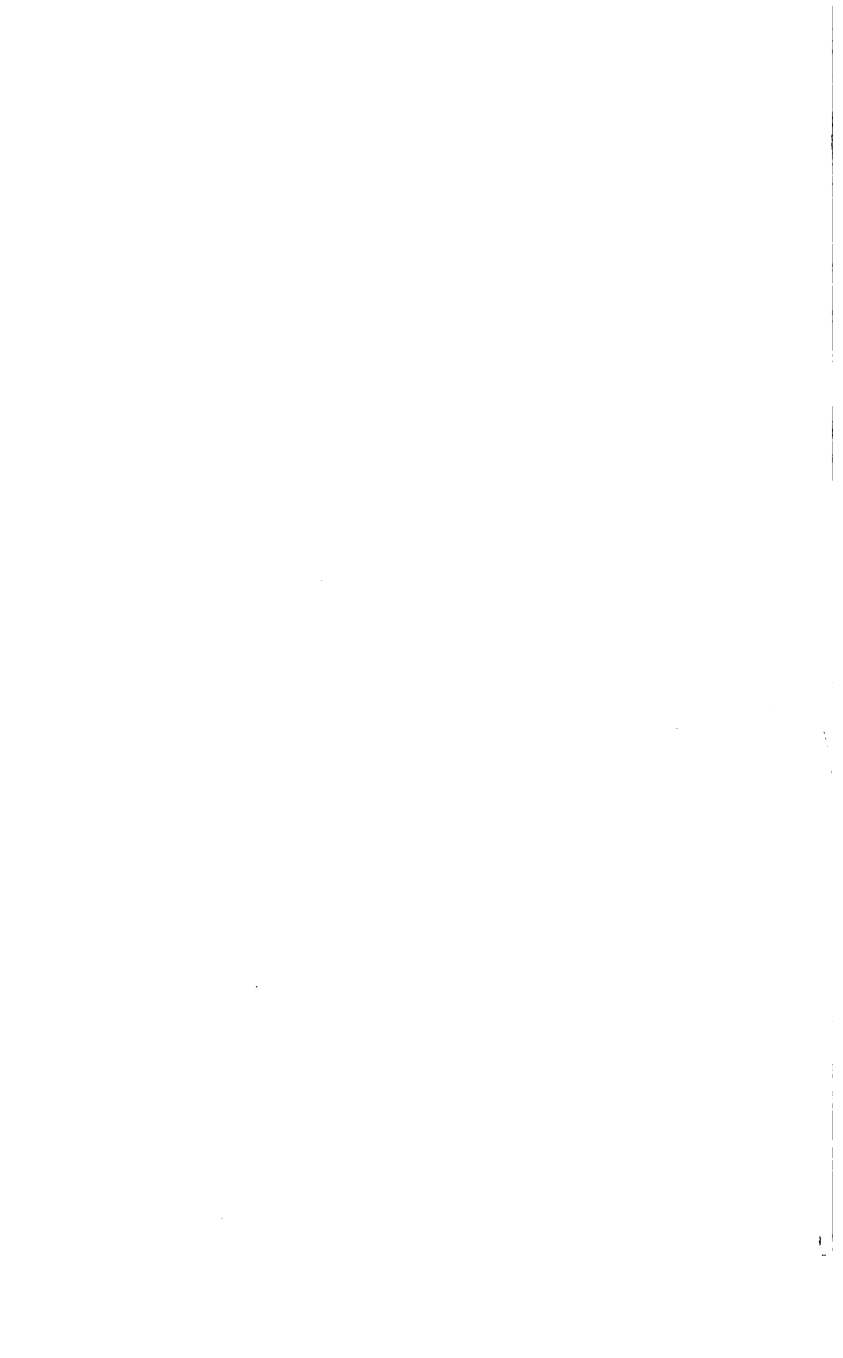
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FADED MYTHS



CHAPTER I

FADED MYTHS

IT is always an interesting study to notice how old ideas leave their mark behind them long after they themselves have vanished away. The student of anthropology is constantly meeting with survivals, with the relics of ancient customs and primitive ways of regarding the universe. The march of progress is never quite regular, the old and the new continually overlap. Long after thought and culture have moved to a higher platform there remain traces of the old state of things, and long before they reach their next stage glimmerings and anticipations of the higher order appear. Survivals are of the utmost

use to the student. He takes some curious custom or strange idea which stands in striking contrast to contemporary life and thought. Here, he says to himself, we have the evidence of an earlier condition of things. It is his task to find it, to discover the type of civilisation in which this strange survival would be perfectly at home. Perhaps the means for doing so are scanty so long as he confines himself to one particular people. But here the comparative method comes to his help; he looks abroad and finds a similar custom or idea in other lands and among other races. By studying it in these surroundings he gains new light as to its meaning. Probably many elements that have disappeared from the example with which he started have remained intact in the parallel instances. At the end of his investigation he may be able to say with some confidence to what stage of development the object of his investigation belongs, and what meaning should be attached to it.

It is quite obvious to any one who looks

below the surface of language how much in our own phraseology testifies to the existence of long obsolete modes of thought. It was not possible that a pseudo-science like astrology should have dominated the minds of men so long without leaving almost ineradicable traces upon human language. And this is to be seen not only in such words as "ill-starred," "disaster," and "saturnine," but in such a verse as that which we sometimes sing—

"No sun shall smite thy head by day,
No pallid moon with sickly ray
Shall blast thy couch, no baleful star
Dart his malignant fire so far."

The sun and the moon in this connexion do not require this explanation, but the baleful star is surely a relic of astrology.

But one of the most interesting pursuits is to track back the language of mythology. In many cases it is with faded myths that we have to do, with myths out of which the original colour has been so bleached

that we do not at first suspect what it is that we have before us. Much of the language of religion has an origin of this kind ; it has ceased to be mythical and has become poetry. Hymns naturally furnish us with several examples. When we sing—

“ His chariots of wrath
The deep thunder-clouds form ;
And dark is His path
On the wings of the storm ! ”

what do we mean by the words ? Probably few stop to analyse them, they are enthralled by the beauty of the language and carried away by the swing of the music, and the impression made on them is of something rather vaguely splendid than clear-cut and precise. It would be a great mistake to imagine that because the words will bear no strict interpretation, since no one supposes that God actually uses the thunder-cloud as His chariot, such a passage should therefore be expunged from our hymn-books. It is poetry and

not prose, it has an emotional and not a scientific value. It does not speak the language of Systematic Theology, but it has the power of stimulating deep devotional feelings. If we look into the language we see that it is obviously derived from the Old Testament, and in particular from Old Testament poetry. In the magnificent description of the theophany in the 18th Psalm we read—

“He bowed the heavens also, and came down ;
And thick darkness was under his feet.
And he rode upon a cherub and did fly :
Yea, he flew swiftly upon the wing of the wind.
He made darkness his hiding-place, his pavilion
round about him ;
Darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies.”

In all probability the cherub was originally the thunder-cloud, just as the seraph was the forked lightning. It is the cherubim that form the chariot in Ezekiel's vision on which God moves, and it is out of the midst of a great luminous cloud

that the cherubim are said to bear the throne on which God sat. When the appearance of these cherubim is said to resemble burning coals of fire, with lightning flashing from it, we observe how the original thought of the thunder-cloud from which the lightning leaps survives in the description. And similarly we read in Isaiah xix. 1, "Behold the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud and cometh into Egypt." And in Psalm civ. 3, we read, "Who maketh the clouds his chariot; who walketh upon the wings of the wind." He would show himself a very poor interpreter who insisted that these expressions really mean what they say; they mean it no more than the hymn I have already quoted; it is the language of poetry, not the language of scientific theology. But how fine a testimony this fact yields to us of the lofty development attained by Hebrew religion! The writers lived in a world in which mythology was rampant and the lowest ideas clustered about the gods. Yet with-

out any feeling of hesitation these Psalmists praised their God in the language of mythology. It is a proof how completely the community had risen above the stage in which such phrases might have been a source of spiritual danger. I cannot do better here than quote Professor Cheyne's words in reply to the criticism of the Deists that the religion of the Psalmists was half barbarous. "Rightly viewed, however, they are no proof of barbarism, but rather of Israel's complete emergence from barbarism. The freedom with which the Psalmists use anthromorphic, or let us say at once mythic expressions, is a consequence of the sense of religious security which animates them. They have no expectation of being taken literally; they know that each member of the Church has the key of their meaning. Israel in Babylon has put away its childish religion, but retains a childlike love of mythic phrases. Now that these have been emptied of their superstition they may do

good service as religious symbols. And why should they not? Can we find better ones ourselves? How vivid they are! How near they bring God to the heart, and God's children in all ages and of all religions to each other!"

THE MUTINOUS SEA

CHAPTER II

THE MUTINOUS SEA

THERE is a verse in Charles Wesley's hymn—

“Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,”

which may serve as the starting-point for this chapter.

It runs as follows—

“The waves of the sea have lift up their voice,
Sore troubled that we in Jesus rejoice ;
The floods they are roaring, but Jesus is here ;
While we are adoring, He always is near.”

Why should Wesley represent the waves of the sea as sore troubled on account of

our joyful faith in Jesus? The answer to the question takes us a long way back in human thought, though we have parallels in modern hymns. There is Watts's fine verse—

“Loud may the troubled ocean roar ;
In sacred peace our souls abide ;
While every nation, every shore
Trembles, and dreads the swelling tide.”

or Keble's

“Let them roar, His awful surges,
Let them boil—each dark-browed hill
Tremble, where the proud wave urges ;
Here is yet one quiet rill ;
Her calm waters,
Zion's joy, flow clear and still.”

These are genuine parallels, but they are based simply on Psalm xlv. It is, in fact, to the Old Testament that we must go back for the source, though not the ultimate source, of this conception. The sea is constantly represented as a power hostile

to God. If, for example, we start with Psalm xlvii., the writer, in face of the terrible convulsions of nature, is undismayed because God is his refuge and strength. The proud swelling of the foaming waters may cause the mountains to quake, yet the believer remains untroubled. But there are other passages which suggest more strongly the sea's rebelliousness. When Job is driven desperate by the sense of God's watchfulness, he turns upon Him to ask in bitter irony if he is a sea or a sea-monster that God must needs watch him so narrowly. Here the sea is God's enemy, which is to be kept under strict control lest it use its liberty to bring in once more the ancient reign of chaos. So, too, we read in Jeremiah of the sea's vain struggles to pass its bounds, "Will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it? and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not

prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it." Similarly the Divine Wisdom in the remarkable passage in the eighth chapter of Proverbs refers to the era of creation as a time when God gave to the sea its bounds, that the waters should not transgress His commandment. Again and again we have references to God as subduing the fury of the sea with His power. When it first broke loose from the nether deep God shut it up with doors and placed its boundary, that its proud waves might be stayed.

Closely connected with the sea is the dragon or serpent. Thus we read in Amos of those who seek to escape from God. They may dig into the underworld or climb up to heaven, yet God will drag them from their retreat; and then he adds, "and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them." In the remarkable apocalypse, Isaiah xxiv-xxvii., we read how God with His sore

and great and strong sword will punish leviathan the flying serpent, and leviathan the winding serpent, and will slay the dragon that is in the sea. These are often thought to symbolise national powers ; but even if that is the case they go back for an explanation to very old ideas. We read in Psalm civ. of leviathan as one of the denizens of the deep. With this monster God had done battle in ancient days. We have frequent references to this. Thus among the great achievements of God in the past, of which His people make mention in their appeal for help in present distress, we get such passages as these, "Art not thou he that cut Rahab in pieces, that pierced the dragon?" or again, "Thou did'st break up the sea by thy strength, thou brakest the heads of the dragon in the wilderness, thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, thou gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness," and again, "Thou rulest the pride of the sea, when the waves

thereof arise thou stillest them, thou hast broken Rahab in pieces as one that is slain, thou has scattered thine enemies with the arm of thy strength." Job sadly reminds himself how futile it would be to contend with God by the recollection that the helpers of Rahab were crushed into submission by the mighty power of God. The true meaning of many of these passages has escaped attention because Rahab was a name applied to Egypt, and it was plausible to find in the allusions to the dividing of the sea a reference to the crossing of the Red Sea. But closer inspection of the passages shows that some of them are not really capable of this interpretation, and that they must be explained by reference to some still earlier conflict.

Before I pass on to consider what this conflict was, there are two or three points that deserve attention. For ourselves the sea is closely entwined with some of our dearest and proudest memories. It is natural for an Englishman to feel the spell

of the ocean and to view it with friendly eyes. It is our boast that we rule the waves and that our flag floats on every sea. We must, however, divest ourselves of these prepossessions if we are to place ourselves at the Old Testament point of view. Israel was not a sea-faring people, it possessed little coast, and what it possessed provided it with no good harbours. The sea was therefore something alien to the Hebrews, whose instincts were rather those of the bedouin than of the mariner. I have elsewhere pointed out how uncongenial the sea was to the author of Job, who waxes enthusiastic in praise of the desert. Moreover, quite ignorant of science, they must have been impressed by the problem why is it that the sea is so restless? The prophet speaks of the troubled sea which cannot rest. It seems to have struck the children of the desert, accustomed to the long stretches of still and monotonous sand, that its unquiet tossing needed explanation. They saw how, when the storm

arose, the waves shot upward towards the sky, foaming in their rage or beating against the cliff as if they would tear it down. Yet the sea was always foiled in its attempts ; it could not pass beyond the bounds assigned to it, it could not reach heaven however high it may fling its angry waves. Hence they were led to think of the sea as a heaven-assaulting power that might be dangerous were it not chained to its place by the omnipotent hand of God.

This conception of the sea as a power hostile to God, which has survived in our hymns and is to be found in the Old Testament, goes back ultimately to Babylon. It is especially to Gunkel that our thanks are due for the detailed proof of this position. It is probably true that with the enthusiasm of a discoverer he has pushed his views too far, and referred to Babylon for the origin of conceptions which have not as yet, at any rate, been proved to have existed among the Babylonians. But in

his book on Creation and Chaos he brought together a large mass of evidence both from the Old Testament and from Babylonian literature in support of his main thesis. Much of the material was, of course, already familiar to scholars—a good deal of it, indeed, to a wider public.

According to the Creation story, which circulated in Babylonia, there was a primeval conflict between Marduk, the god of Light, and Tiamat, the Chaos-Monster. Tiamat is equivalent to the Hebrew word, *t'hom*, which is translated "the deep" in Genesis i. 2. She is also to be identified with Rahab, and probably with leviathan. "The helpers of Rahab," to whom Job refers, were the brood of monsters whom she brought into being to help her in her conflict with Marduk. In that conflict Marduk slew the monster, according to the generally accepted story, he then cut her in two, and of one-half of her body he made the sky, and of the other half the earth.

"He cleft her like a flat fish into two,
The one half of her he set up, and made a
covering for the heaven,
Set a bar before it, stationed a guard,
Commanded them not to let its waters issue
forth."

It is from Berossus that we learn that the other half was made into the earth.

But there seem to have been other versions of the myth according to which the monster was not killed, but kept under strict guard. It is this type of the story that is reflected in some of the passages already quoted. Job's bitter reference to the sea-monster, over which God must keep watchful guard, or the reference to the serpent in the depths of the sea, or to leviathan taking his pastime in the ocean, all pre-suppose a form of the story in which the monster was not killed, but strictly confined to the deep; rage still lives in its heart, but rebellion would be unsuccessful. The sea is always troubled and restless, as the monster sullenly turns and turns within it; or when its rage burns more fiercely

and it strains to be free, the tossing of the angry waves reveals its impotent fury. Just so, in other lands the earthquake is explained as the stirring of the rebel Titan beneath the mountain piled on him for punishment, while he breathes fire from the volcano. A time is to come, so the myths apparently said, when a brief spell of freedom would be restored to the monster. For the last things were to be like the first ; and just as creation had been ushered in by a victory over chaos, so the world would be re-created from the wild havoc wrought by leviathan, who was once again to be subdued by Marduk.

There are parallels elsewhere to this thought, that the imprisoned evil powers break loose from their confinement. In the Persian eschatology the dragon is released by Angro-Mainu, the enemy of Ahura Madza. In the Orphic myth the Titans escape from Tartarus, kill Dionysus, and are then consumed by Zeus.

The myth was probably suggested by the

physical conditions in Babylonia. Every year, with the melting of the mountain snows, the floods came; and over a vast expanse of country the flat plains lay submerged, the watery chaos reigned supreme. But as time wore on the sun grew stronger and stronger, the floods vanished before him, and soon a luxuriant vegetation took their place. Thus every year this drama was repeated: chaos was vanquished by the sun. And as men began to speculate on the origin of things, these facts suggested the line along which their thoughts went. So they said it must have been ~~when~~ the world was created; first of all ~~came~~ the reign of the watery chaos with darkness brooding all over it, and then the radiant sun-god conquered the chaos-demon and created the ordered universe.

Since the discovery of the Tell-el-Amarna tablets we have known that fourteen centuries before Christ the land of Canaan was saturated with Babylonian civilisation. The cuneiform writing is extremely difficult and

complicated, yet it is a remarkable fact that it was used in diplomatic correspondence between parties neither of whom were Babylonian. But where Babylonian culture prevailed, the myths of Babylon must also have been known. We may, therefore, assume that at this time, and probably many centuries before, the stories which we read on the clay tablets were well known to the Canaanites. It has long been a problem how we are to account for the striking similarity between the Creation and Deluge stories that we find in Genesis and the Babylonian stories. It is probable that the Hebrews, who were comparatively a young people, derived them ultimately from Babylon ; but it is highly improbable that they learnt them during the Exile. It is not likely that they learnt them during the period of the monarchy ; it is also improbable that they brought them with them from Babylon. The view that most commends itself is that they learnt them from the Canaanites. And here we cannot

sufficiently wonder at the difference the Hebrews have made. What is really remarkable to the student of religion is not the similarity between the stories of Genesis and the cuneiform inscriptions, but the difference. This is striking in the Deluge story. There, on the one hand, we have an unethical conception of the disaster, a gross polytheism, according to which the gods cower before the storm like dogs in a kennel, have their favourites, and crowd like flies around the sacrificer ; while, on the other side, judgment selects its victims on moral principles, there is a pure monotheism and a worthy conception of God. So, too, in the story of the Creation the whole conception of Tiamat has disappeared, leaving the barest trace in the name by which the watery chaos is called. God is the omnipotent ruler, who does not need to contend with any power below Himself, and who brings all into existence by an effortless word. The more we emphasise the gross character of all this story of Mar-

duk's conflict with the dragon of the abyss, the more we are impressed by the wonder of an inspiration which could transmute the base metal of heathenism into the pure gold of Scripture.

But while the Babylonian myth lost all its mythical features in the sober story of Creation, these still survived in Hebrew poetry. We must remember that these poems are for the most part late ; they date from a period when the victory over idolatry in Israel had been definitely won. And, therefore, as I have already explained, they had become spiritually harmless. The author of Job, the Psalmists, and the Prophets were not only monothelists themselves ; they were speaking to a people who knew there was no God but one. And, therefore, in the language of poetry they could, without offence and without risk of misunderstanding, use the old stories to glorify God ; they could remind Him how He had broken the heads of leviathan in pieces and given the monster's flesh to be

meat for the desert-dwellers; they could speak of the time when Rahab's brood of monsters were crushed into helplessness by the might of God.

This type of language is to be found even in the New Testament, especially in the Apocalypse. In the strange story of the dragon, the woman, and the man child, and of the war in heaven between Michael and the dragon which we find in the twelfth chapter we have a continuance of the same ideas. It is true that no Babylonian parallel has yet been recovered, but it is by no means improbable that a story of the birth of Marduk may be found among the cuneiform tablets. If so, it is not unlikely that it may present striking similarities to the story of the birth of Apollo, and the Egyptian story of Hathor, the mother of Horus the sun-god and the dragon Typhon. These are probably all forms of the same original myth of the conflict between the sun-god and the demon of darkness and

chaos. As it appears in the Book of Revelation the story has been considerably modified. In the original the flight of the mother is to secure the child's birth in safety, in the Apocalypse the story has been so transformed, for reasons into which I need not now inquire, that the flight of the mother follows the birth of the child, and the child's safety is secured by his being caught up to the throne of God immediately after his birth.

Again, the beast who represents Anti-christ is said in the thirteenth chapter to arise out of the sea. And we understand why it is that in the author's vision of final blessedness we should have a feature which appears so strange as his prediction that there should be no more sea. It is the language of poetry, not of sober prose; the author means just the same as he meant with his triumphant exclamation that the kingdoms of the world have become the king-

doms of our God and of His Messiah. The forces of evil, which have resisted so long the advent of peace and brotherhood, are crushed at last into impotence, and the unchallenged reign of righteousness has come in.

There is much that is still obscure about the Apocalypse, but some things at any rate are fairly clear. For the author the Kingdom of Wickedness is concentrated in the Roman Empire, whose last Emperor is to come up out of the abyss and reign as the incarnation of the beast. The throne of Satan is set up wherever the worship of the Emperor is carried on with exceptional enthusiasm and bigotry, and soon the fanaticism of the worshippers will grow to such a pitch that they will bear on their hand or their forehead the mark of dedication to the beast. And in this rising sea of patriotic idolatry the writer sees the followers of the Lamb standing firm amid all the wild raging of the billows.

Nor were the waves tossing in mere impotent fury, for they claimed a vast number of victims who would render the beast no homage. But the author is in no wise dismayed, the very rage of Satan proves that his time is short. He has already been conquered in heaven and cast down to earth, and the writer proclaims woe to the earth because the devil has gone down to it to wreak what suffering he can on the followers of his conqueror, spurred on to supreme exertions, since when three and a half years are past the hour of his doom will have struck and power will be wrested from his hand. Thus even out of the extremity of darkness and terror the writer plucks a hope. It is true that matters are desperate, but be of good cheer, the savage rage of the devil proves how quickly his power is to pass.

The Apocalyptist lived at a time when the floods were indeed roaring and the waves of the sea were lifting up their

voice. But he sustained himself and his readers with the assurance which had sustained many Biblical writers before him, that the rage of the powers of evil was destined to swift abatement, and He who had at the beginning abolished the reign of chaos and created the ordered universe we know, would at the end eclipse His ancient achievement and create new heavens and a new earth.

We live in a very different era. Christianity has become the religion of the most highly civilised races, nominally at any rate. It is not the sea's impetuous onslaught that we have now to withstand. There is sunshine on the face of the waters and the waves murmur to us with soft voices that lure us with strange power. But at heart the world is still the same and Satan is none the less Satan because he is clad as an angel of light. The sea is our open foe no longer, but even more to be dreaded is its smooth, smiling treachery and unsus-

pected current. The message of the Apocalyptist cannot mean for us precisely what it meant for the earliest readers, but essentially the message is the same—a message of warning against compromise with the powers of evil, an exhortation to steadfast resistance, an assurance of sure though slow-coming victory, a conviction that the kingdoms of this world are still to become the kingdoms of our God and of His Messiah.



**HOW ART THOU FALLEN FROM
HEAVEN !**

CHAPTER III

HOW ART THOU FALLEN FROM HEAVEN!

A LONGSIDE of the myths of the dark thunder-cloud and the turbulent sea we find survivals of a Dawn-myth in the Old Testament. The Dawn is represented as a woman. Thus in Job we read of "the eyelids of the Dawn," where the picture flashed upon us by the poet's genius is that of the light suddenly looking over the mountain ridges with the sunbeams springing from the eyelids as soft and luminous eyelashes. The Dawn has a son, he is the Morning Star. Reference is made to him in the famous words: "How art thou fallen from Heaven, O Day Star, son of the Dawn!" The rendering "Lucifer"

instead of "Day Star" has occasioned the widespread misinterpretation that the passage refers to the casting of Satan out of heaven.

A mere inspection of the context in which the line is found ought to have sufficed to show that this could not be its meaning. The passage occurs in the splendid ode on the overthrow of the King of Babylon in Isaiah xiv. This ode, which seems to have been written during the Exile shortly before the overthrow of Babylon, is probably from the same hand to which we owe the fierce prophecy of Babylon's destruction and desolation in the preceding chapter, a prophecy which ends with the assertion, "Her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged," and was therefore written when the overthrow of Babylon was imminent.

In the ode, which occupies the greater part of the following chapter, the author depicts with unconcealed delight and biting scorn the downfall of the Babylonian

kingdom. He opens with a triumphant cry over the end of the oppressor and the stilling of his rage. It is Yahweh who has broken his rod, which smote the nations with untiring stroke. Now all the earth is at peace, and the fir-trees and cedars rejoice that they will be no longer cut down to provide timber for the palaces of the tyrant. From the peace of the upper world the poet passes by a swift transition to Sheol, that dismal land of the dead, which is a pale reflection of the earth, and where the swift currents of life have passed into changeless stagnation. While the removal of the oppressor brings quiet to the earth, no longer troubled by his raging, his entrance into Sheol creates unwonted excitement in it. The nerveless, bloodless shades who inhabit the gloomy underworld and live there a shadowy existence are roused to the utmost interest of which they are capable. Stung by this novel excitement from their usual apathy, they move to meet him at

his coming, while his fellow kings, who sit on thrones as they had sat on earth, are so stirred that they actually rise to greet him. They can hardly believe that so powerful a monarch ruling over so vast an empire should have suffered the common lot and become as weak as themselves. But for him there is a worse fate reserved than for the other kings. He does not sit upon a throne in Sheol, but, as the poet proceeds to say, the worm is spread under him and worms cover him. The meaning of this becomes clear to us from a later line where the writer says, "Yet thou shalt be brought down to Sheol, to the uttermost parts of the pit." The usual destiny of a king in Sheol would be to sit upon a throne and exercise a shadowy dominion, yet he is not suffered to do this, but is driven into the pit's farthest recesses, there to lie upon the bare ground shuddering as the worms burrow beneath him and crawl over him.

But the poet has not yet filled the

cup of mockery. It is true that there is a wide contrast between the regal splendour and mighty empire of the king on earth and the ghastly humiliation that awaits him in Sheol. But there is a contrast more tragic still between the destiny to which he aspired and the fate to which he has been doomed. For he had thought to escape Sheol altogether, and to be one of the favoured mortals who should be welcomed to a seat among the gods. No throne in the underworld should be his, but a throne exalted above the stars of God. There where the gods met in congregation on Mount Aralu in the far distant north he would take his seat in their midst, ascending above the heights of the clouds like the Most High. And why should he not? for the seed of the gods was in him. He counted himself the son of the radiant Dawn, and therefore is mockingly hailed by the poet as the Day Star, a title which has been translated Lucifer, or light-bringer,

since it is the harbinger of the day. As he was the son of a goddess he had a right, he thought, to anticipate, when this life was ended, a seat among the gods. And how bitter the disappointment that awaited him! In imagination he thought of himself as in Heaven already, but he was a fallen star, shooting like a meteor from the sky to the nethermost depths of the underworld. Instead of the throne in heaven there was not even a throne in Sheol, instead of the proud exaltation among the gods in the uttermost parts of the north, he was to drag out an infamous existence in the uttermost parts of the pit, his companions not glorious deities but loathsome worms. If the contrast between the king's royal state and his wretched end is effective, how much the effect is heightened when we know that he counted himself no mere mortal, and especially when he claimed the bright Dawn for his mother. For what splendid destiny his origin seemed to prepare him,

and how tragic that the herald of the day should be plunged by one swift stroke into the nether gloom !

It would seem that the poet thought of the fallen tyrant as suffering this fate because his body had received no burial. We are familiar with the extent to which this mode of thought prevailed in antiquity. Thus we remember how Antigone dared the vengeance of Creon, the king who had decreed that her brother's body should lie unburied, and buried him herself to the forfeit of her life. So Palinurus, the pilot of Æneas, his body tossing unburied on the beach, is represented by Vergil as unable to cross the river Styx into the realm of shades since his body is unburied. He asks Æneas either to find his body and cast earth upon it, which was adequate for ancient burial, or to take him with him across the Styx. But the Sybil rebukes his desire that his spirit should be taken across the stream while his body has received no rites of burial.

“From whence,
O Palinurus, sprang this wild desire?
Shalt thou unburied view the Stygian waves,
And the stern river of the Eumenides,
Or tread the bank unbidden? Cease to hope
That heaven's fix'd doom can be unbent by
prayer.”¹

And even to our own day it is a well-known belief that the spirit cannot be at rest till the body has received the last rites, the ghost will walk until these have been fulfilled. Many may remember the use made of this by Lucas Malet in “The Gateless Barrier.”

With another swift transition the poet passes from Sheol to the battle-field, and taunts the king with the way in which the spectators will narrowly scan his untended corpse on the field and moralise over the strange reverse of fortune. While other kings slept in glory, each in his own house, he, like an abhorred scion cut from the family tree and flung aside, was

¹ *Æneid of Vergil*, translated by James Rhoades, page 155.

doomed to be cast with the meanest into the pit that was heaped with the indiscriminate slain. And since he was not thus buried like other kings he could not like them be enthroned in Sheol. The soul and the body share a common lot. This also is a widely spread mode of thought. Hence when the savage mutilates his dead enemy, it is not simply with a view to relieving his hate by outrage on a foe who has escaped him. He has a serious practical purpose in view, that he may strike and mutilate the soul that has survived, through the body which is dead. It is of course true that ill-treatment of a corpse takes place even on the part of those who have no such superstition. Many of us have no doubt read how in Russia in the case of a victim who has perished under the knout before his full punishment had been inflicted, the strokes that remained have been inflicted on his dead body. We are reminded also of Carlyle's grim warning to those who scoffed at ideas. The

aristocrats sneered at Rousseau's ideas, but their skins went to bind the second edition of his book. The thought of a connexion between soul and body, which survives their separation, occurs in a gruesome passage in Job where the sufferer, mournfully meditating on man's lot after death, seems to say that the soul in Sheol experiences the pain endured by the body as it decays in the tomb.

“ And surely the mountain falling cometh to nought,
And the rock is removed out of its place;
The waters wear the stones;
The overflowings thereof wash away the dust of
the earth :
And thou destroyest the hope of man.
Thou prevailest for ever against him, and he
passeth ;
Thou changest his countenance, and sendest him
away.
His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not ;
And they are brought low, and he perceiveth it
not of them.
But his flesh upon him hath pain,
And his soul within him mourneth.”

It will, I trust, be clear from the fore-

going how much we gain from a true understanding of the passage. Instead of the reference to the fall of Satan from heaven, which is more remote from our everyday life, we have a direct and practical warning against the folly of pride and unhallowed ambition. This again opens out a wide vista of reflections. In antiquity there was a constant dread of the jealousy of the gods. This thought has set its mark deep in Greek literature. There was something uncanny about the successful person, and if he was wise, he would not flaunt his happiness or prosperity in the face of heaven, lest he should draw down upon him the envy of the higher powers and swift destruction. The thought has received exquisite expression in Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee":—

" *I* was a child, and *she* was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea;
But we loved with a love that was more than
love—
I and my Annabel Lee,
With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven
Coveted her and me.

“ And this was the reason that, long ago,
 In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
 My beautiful Annabel Lee ;
So that her high-born kinsmen came
 And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre
 In this kingdom by the sea.

“ The angels, not half so happy in heaven,
 Went envying her and me—
Yes! that was the reason (as all men know,
 In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud by night,
 Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.”

The Biblical writers, too, were deeply impressed with the dangers of pride. The Prophets moralised, it is true, the unethical conception of the jealousy of the gods. It would have seemed an unworthy thought to them to think of God as envying the happiness of man. Of course they had not so keen a sense as the Gospel has given to us of the unselfish love of God which finds in the good of His children its highest satisfaction. And there may still linger a sense of God's jealous guard-

ing of His own prerogatives, especially in Ezekiel. But when we read such a passage as this ode on the King of Babylon, or Isaiah's tremendous description of the Day of Yahweh on all that is high and lifted up, or his threat of Yahweh's vengeance on the pride of the King of Assyria, we feel that here is a lesson which not individuals only but nations even to-day need to take more deeply to heart.



**MY SPIRIT SHALL NOT ALWAYS
STRIVE**

CHAPTER IV

MY SPIRIT SHALL NOT ALWAYS STRIVE

THESE words must have done duty in many thousands of sermons to warn people against sinning away their day of grace. They have, no doubt, been responsible for much evil as well as perhaps for some good, for they have tended to darken men's lives with the dread that they had passed beyond the sphere of the Spirit's operation, and that He had abandoned them to themselves. It is very uncertain what the passage does mean, but it may be taken as settled that at any rate it does not mean this. It is very regrettable that in the Revised Version the old translation "strive" has been retained, even though the margin gives alternative renderings. The usual

explanations of the word are either "to be abased" or "to rule," but it cannot be proved that the Hebrew verb bore either of these meanings. The ancient translations took it to mean "abide" and the context greatly favours that interpretation. The whole verse, however, is full of difficulties, and it is not easy to discuss the sense of the particular clause apart from the sense to be attached to the passage as a whole. The first four verses of the sixth chapter of Genesis constitute one of the strangest passages in the Old Testament. It deals with the marriage of the sons of God with the daughters of men. The most ancient interpretation, which was that followed generally by the Fathers of the Christian Church, is that the sons of God are to be explained as the angels. This view is also taken by the majority of modern commentators, and I have no doubt myself that it is correct. The attempts to explain away the term as a name for the pious race of Seth may be taken as certainly in-

correct. The Book of Enoch had much to say about these angels, and there are echoes of the same belief in the New Testament. There is a reference to them in Jude 6, where we read of the angels which kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation, as kept in everlasting bonds under darkness to the judgment of the great day, and in the parallel passage in 2 Peter ii. 4 we read that God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus. So, too, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians Paul commands that women should be veiled in public services "because of the angels," a passage which may be, and has been, otherwise interpreted, but which I think has no satisfactory explanation except the one to which I am referring. Of these unnatural unions between the angels and women the Nephilim were the offspring. That in the cycle of stories on which the narrator drew, much more was told about the Nephilim is clear from the fact that

they are described as "men of name." Probably, however, the stories connected with them were of such a kind that the author preferred not to incorporate them.

There are one or two points in the interpretation of the passage which may be referred to. The words translated "For that he also is flesh" present, perhaps, an insoluble difficulty. It is impossible to discuss them fully without reference to the original. The rendering given in the Revised Version margin, "In their going astray they are flesh," involves simply a difference in one vowel point. It is not so well attested. This would make no difference were the sense superior, for the vowel points were added only some centuries after the time of Christ. Neither reading, however, yields a good sense. "He also" should mean "He as well as the sons of the Elohim," but that cannot be the correct sense, for the simple reason that the sons of the Elohim were not flesh but spirit. But there is also

a difficulty about the Hebrew form. The alternative reading is awkward, owing to the transition from the singular to the plural and then the return to the plural. "In their going astray he is flesh" can hardly be correct. The Revised Version margin disguises the difficulty by translating the singular pronoun as a plural—"In their going astray they are flesh." It is possible that the word has arisen from the carelessness of a scribe either in writing the word twice over or in mistaking the word that he had before him. In the following verse we read, "The Nephilim were in the earth in those days and also after that." The words "and also after that" are not to be taken as an integral part of the sentence connecting with the clause that follows. They are rather what we should have placed in a footnote. The Hebrews, of course, had no such device as footnotes, and if a thing was to be expressed at all it was taken into the text. Probably it originated with a reader who

remembered that the Nephilim were mentioned in Numbers xiii. 33, and wished to call the attention of the reader to the fact that the Nephilim were on the earth not only in those days, but also long after.

With these remarks about the story in our mind we may return to the verse with which we are more immediately concerned. A reference to the pleading of the Holy Ghost with sinners does not fit the context even if it could be got out of the Hebrew, for the transgressors in this case were the angels, not men. Moreover in a document so early, a reference to the Holy Spirit in this sense would be unexampled. Besides, the reason that is assigned in the following clause does not harmonise with this interpretation, for that man is flesh constitutes no reason why the Holy Spirit should not strive with him, otherwise we might put the question, if the fact of man's fleshly constitution is a reason why the Spirit should not always strive with him, is it

not a reason why the attempt should be altogether abandoned? Elsewhere in the Old Testament we find the fact that man is flesh urged as an excuse for his moral weakness. Thus in Psalm lxxviii. after we have had a long catalogue of the transgressions of Israel in the desert we read—

“But he being full of compassion forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not,
Yea, many a time he turned his anger away,
And did not stir up all his wrath.
And he remembered that they were but flesh;
A wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.”

On the ordinary interpretation of our passage man's fleshly constitution would be given as a reason not for God's forgiveness, but as a reason why at last he was weary of His attempts at reform.

When we substitute the rendering adopted by the ancient versions, “My Spirit shall not abide in man for ever,” although there are still serious difficulties in the detailed interpretation of the verse, the general meaning becomes pretty plain.

The Spirit of God in that case must be understood in a very different sense from that which we put upon the term. Angels are spoken of as sons of God. This term does not bear quite the sense that we place upon it. For example, the Hebrews would speak of "Sons of the Prophets," where we should speak of members of the prophetic guild; so the angels are called "Sons of Elohim," because they belong to the Elohim as distinguished from the human order. The distinction between the two was of a metaphysical character; the human order consisted of flesh, the Elohim order consisted of spirit. Now the action of the angels meant that they had disregarded the limits of being fixed by God. By mating with women, a race had originated in which human and angelic were blended together. Thus a confusion of flesh and spirit had taken place which involved transgression of the limits that sharply sundered them. These angels had not kept their first estate, they

had transgressed the bounds appointed to them. The confusion that resulted seemed intolerable to Yahweh, therefore He is represented as saying that this state of things is not to go on perpetually, it is to be brought to an end. Accordingly we must understand Him to speak of "My spirit" in a somewhat more comprehensive sense than we naturally assign to the words, and to mean thereby the metaphysical essence which He and the angels possessed in common, and which by their action had become intermingled with flesh.

It need hardly be pointed out that a narrative of this kind is not one with which a Christian can feel very much at home. Even in the Old Testament itself it stands alone, and while we may be thankful that it is preserved since it casts a welcome light on the development of religious ideas, and helps us to realise how successfully on the whole, under the guidance of inspiration, the religion of Israel eliminated the mythological element

of which this is a remnant, it naturally has no message for us who live in the clear light of the Gospel. For in the first place the supreme affirmation of the Gospel is that there is no such barrier between man and the spiritual realm as this passage presupposes. On the contrary, the very message which Christ proclaimed is that God is our Father, and that we are all of us His children. His Gospel is not one of a restricted Fatherhood and a restricted sonship, even the Prodigal Son remained a son. In virtue of this great fact the New Testament writers do not look on mankind as inferior to angels. They take a very different line from that. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews argues that the present age is subject to the angels, it is true, but the age to come is to be subject to man. Hence man's destiny is not to become an angel, but to be above the angels. He would not have sympathised with the hymn, "I want to be an angel,"

for he would have said, "I am going to be something very much better."

It is clear in the light of what I have said that the words, "My spirit shall not always strive with man," ought to be banished from our pulpits. The words are not in the Bible, but only in an incorrect English translation. The passage has nothing to do with the striving of the Holy Spirit with the sinner, and the whole context belongs to an order of ideas superseded by Christianity. The question remains, however, whether the mistranslation and misuse do not rest upon a correct idea, namely, that there is a possibility that the Spirit may cease in some cases to exercise His ministry of urging men to repent and be reconciled to God. This question is less in men's minds to-day than it once was, yet it is no doubt sometimes asked, and in any case for its own sake it deserves careful consideration.

Most of us will remember the terrible scene in the "Pilgrim's Progress," where the

Interpreter took Christian into a very dark room, where there sat a man in an iron cage. "The man," Bunyan says, "to look on, seemed very sad. He sat with his eyes looking down to the ground, his hands folded together, and he sighed as if he would break his heart." On Christian's inquiry, he explained to him that he had once been on the way to the Celestial City, but now he was a man of despair, and could not get out of his iron cage. He had so hardened his heart that he could not repent; he had sinned against light, grieved the Spirit, provoked God to anger so that He had left him. There was no hope for him since he had crucified the Son of God to himself afresh, counted His blood an unholy thing, done despite to the Spirit of Grace, so that now there remained nothing but certain judgment and fiery indignation which should devour him. And when Christian asked him, "But canst thou not now repent and return?" the man replied, "God hath denied me repentance.

His word gives me no encouragement to believe; yea, Himself hath shut me up in this iron cage; nor can all the men in the world let me out. O eternity! eternity! how shall I grapple with the misery that I must meet with in eternity?"

The insight of Bunyan into Scripture, and his own deep religious experience, entitle his opinions to respectful consideration, but we cannot help remembering that there had been a morbid strain in Bunyan's spiritual history of which we must not lose sight in considering his testimony on a matter of this kind. All readers of that wonderful spiritual autobiography, "Grace Abounding," will remember the obsession which tormented him till at last he came to the belief that he had committed the unpardonable sin, that after resisting for a very long time the prompting to sell Christ he had in a moment of desperation yielded. It would be an absurdity to suppose that Bunyan had really committed the transgression of which his sensitive conscience

accused him. It was a type of religious mania not unknown to students of psychology, and of which an interesting discussion may be found in Professor Royce's "Studies of Good and Evil." That Bunyan had learnt the lesson of this experience is suggested by the very remarkable scene in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. The whole passage is well worth quoting :—

"One thing I would not let slip : I took notice that now poor Christian was so confounded that he did not know his own voice ; and thus I perceived it. Just when he was come over against the mouth of the burning pit, one of the wicked ones got behind him, and stepped up softly to him, and whisperingly suggested many grievous blasphemies to him, which he verily thought had proceeded from his own mind. This put Christian more to it than anything he had met with before, even to think that he should now blaspheme Him that he loved so much before ; yet could he have helped it, he would not

have done it ; but he had not the discretion neither to stop his ears nor to know from whence those blasphemies came."

It is more remarkable that Bunyan should have learnt the lesson of this experience and not have been somewhat shaken as to the truth of his picture of the Man in the Iron Cage. For Bunyan had himself known what it was to experience hardness of heart, so that though he would have given a thousand pounds for a tear, he was unable to shed one. Insensibility of this kind was only to be expected as a recoil from the terrible strain of emotion in which he normally lived. This dearth of the soul is in fact the experience through which many saints have had to pass, and, of course, Bunyan, unlike the Man in the Iron Cage, had not started on his pilgrimage and then wilfully given himself up to sin.

If we consider the case of the Man in the Iron Cage rather more closely, I think it cannot be denied that it represents a real experience through which not a few have actually passed. The question,

however, is not whether the state of despair has been experienced but whether it has been justified. One of the texts commonly quoted to prove this has already been shown to have no bearing whatever on the subject. The other passages are those that we find in the sixth and tenth chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews and in the first Epistle of John, together with Christ's reference to the sin that should not be forgiven. The passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews are, I think, of a very solemn character. They are addressed not to an imaginary but to a real danger, this danger being that those who had tasted of the heavenly gift—in other words, who had become Christians—should fall away and crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh. In the light of our general knowledge of the conditions it can hardly be doubted that what the author has in mind is a complete apostasy from Christianity, in all probability a return to Judaism, though some scholars believe that the danger is that of falling away into irreligion altogether.

It must be understood that this is a deliberate apostasy, and the terms which are applied to it are of a very remarkable character. The various attempts to tone down the severity of the passage seem to me exegetically unsuccessful for the most part. At the same time I do not think that more is necessarily implied than that the normal methods of God's working are inadequate to cope with an emergency thus created, and I do not see why we should regard such cases as hopeless, inasmuch as it is quite possible that God may employ means which lie outside the ordinary channels of grace. The questions touching the sin against the Holy Ghost or the sin that tends to death have, it is well known, created very much discussion. The only time I ever heard Spurgeon preach he touched upon this topic. His subject did not come home to me, for he was dealing with the case of those who doubted whether they were among the elect. I never had any doubts on that question myself, but only as to

whether I should succeed in making my election sure. In the course of his sermon he dealt with those who were troubled because they feared they might have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost. He told us that he had read as much sound theology as any man, but he had never been able to find any one who knew what the sin against the Holy Ghost was. I do not enter here into the tangled problems that surround these passages, though I believe that the general sense of them is perhaps not so difficult as Spurgeon was inclined to suppose. The real point, I think, that concerns us is that self-torture in this matter is unjustifiable. The very fact that the dread is experienced proves that the sin has not been committed. For the man who commits the sin against the Holy Ghost is the man who has gone to the extreme of sin, he has attained the point where he has no desires at all for God, paralysis has overtaken his spiritual faculty. He has reached a complete insensibility to Divine things, the question

whether he has committed the unpardonable sin will not trouble him. If then there is any soul thus tortured crying out like the Man in the Iron Cage "I cannot repent," let such a soul take courage. His state is sad indeed, the will is paralysed and penitence seems to be atrophied. But like the paralytic he may be borne to Jesus by the willing help of others, he is not wholly dead and recovery is still possible. The fact that he longs that he could repent is a proof that the Holy Spirit is at work with him. Such people remind us of those who are afflicted with the monomania that they are dead, and it is sad indeed to think of those, and their number is large, who are in our asylums suffering from the delusion that they have committed the unpardonable sin.

Preachers accordingly need to be very cautious how they press passages of this kind on the attention of their hearers. They are not likely to have in their congregations many who are even in remote danger of reaching the pitch of wickedness

contemplated in these solemn warnings. And the most painful thing is that these warnings are nearly always taken in at the wrong address. It is people of the finer type of character, of sensitive conscience, given to morbid self-depreciation, who are likely to apply such warnings to themselves, whereas for them they were never intended. It is not the hardened, the utterly depraved, those who are completely insensible to Divine things, who go to the extreme of deliberately taking evil to be their good, that attend our services. It is no doubt our duty to preach the whole counsel of God, but it is equally our duty not to invent terrors of our own to frighten people into goodness. When we think of the horror of great darkness which has settled upon many, and those among the most beautiful of characters, through misunderstanding of these passages, we should think not once or twice only, but a good many times, before we dare invoke them as they have often been invoked.





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Peake, Arthur S. (Arthur Samuel), 1865-1

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